HHC PRESIDENT AVILES, CONGRESSMAN FOSSELLA, COUNCIL MEMBER MCMAHON AND STAKEHOLDER GROUPS ANNOUNCE EXTENSION OF PRIMARY CARE ACCESS PROGRAM FOR STATEN ISLANDERS

One-year, $2 Million Extension Will Serve Low-Income,
Uninsured Patients on Borough's North Shore

New York City – April 13, 2007 – New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) President Alan D. Aviles, joined by Congressman Vito J. Fossella and Councilmember Michael E. McMahon, today announced a one-year extension of Staten Island Health Access (SIHA), a temporary program designed to expand access to medical care for low-income uninsured residents of Staten Island's North Shore, including the growing population of undocumented immigrants. Originally funded with $1.8 million, SIHA will now be extended through June 30, 2008 with an additional $2 million from HHC to support doctors' visits, diagnostic and lab services, and prescription drugs. HHC also funds facilitated enrollment services conducted by the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island through the SIHA program, so that individuals who are eligible for public health insurance can have access to this important resource.

"We are pleased to be able to provide another year of support to the SIHA program until more comprehensive and sustainable safety net health care opportunities are available to all Staten Islanders," said Mayor Bloomberg. "Staten Island is the fastest growing county in New York State and we need to make sure that affordable, primary care is readily available to all its residents. This innovative, interim program helps fill a gap as we work toward a more permanent solution that increases health care access for all."

SIHA was originally designed to bridge the health care needs of North Shore residents until the new Community Health Center of Richmond was established and its service capacity expanded. It began in December 2005 and was scheduled to end on June 30, 2007. More than 2,800 uninsured Staten Islanders have taken advantage of the program and 500 individuals have been assisted with obtaining government-sponsored health insurance.

"Expanding access to needed health care services for those who otherwise could not afford it is central to our mission," said HHC President Alan Aviles. "The SIHA program allows us to fulfill our mission on Staten Island until the Community Health Center of Richmond increases its service capacity through both on-site expansion and the opening of at least one additional site on the North Shore. We are also helping the Richmond Community Health Center to obtain designation as a Federally Qualified Health Center. This designation will allow the center to expand its services to more North Shore residents and receive additional funding, including dedicated federal grants, enhanced Medicaid reimbursement and liability insurance coverage for its physicians."

"This program helps ensure access to critical healthcare for thousands of uninsured Staten Islanders," said Congressman Vito Fossella. "Staten Island Health Access is on the frontlines providing services for residents who are unable to afford it themselves. They are keeping Staten Islanders healthier, saving lives and making a positive difference in our community. Without an extension of SIHA, thousands of uninsured residents would have lost access to their only source of healthcare. I want to thank Mayor Bloomberg and President Aviles for their commitment to SIHA and for ensuring funding is available to continue serving the needs of Staten Island's uninsured."

"The Staten Island Health Access program is another example of the commitment and creativity of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation to ensuring improved health care access to low income New Yorkers, including Staten Island residents," said HHC Board Member Dr. John Maese.

"Given the crisis that Staten Island faces in terms of health care access and affordability, today's announcement of the extension of SIHA is certainly welcomed news for which we are grateful," said Councilmember Michael McMahon. "At the same time we must recognize that this is a basic minimum and we need to do much more collectively to ensure that Staten Islanders are able to receive adequate health care on a level par with other parts of the city."

"On behalf of the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island, I'd like to express my gratitude to the HHC for their extension of the facilitated enrollment contract on Staten Island," said David Sorkin, Executive Director of the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island. "Staten Island has a surprisingly large number of people eligible for public heath insurance but not enrolled, as well as a large population of individuals who have health issues but do not qualify for public health insurance. Staten Island Health Access (SIHA) has provided health coverage to thousands of Staten Islanders, and its continuation will ensure improved health to Islanders in need. The JCC is delighted to continue our partnership with HHC and to provide high quality facilitated enrollment to individuals in need on Staten Island."

President Aviles was also joined by other elected officials, members of the clergy, El Centro de Hospitalidad's Elizabeth Lopez and Project Hospitality's Reverend Terry Troia.

"HHC appreciates the continued advocacy of many individuals and organizations in Staten Island concerning the healthcare needs of its residents. We particularly look forward to working with Congressman Fossella in ensuring that the Community Health Center of Richmond receives designation as a federally qualified health center," added Aviles.

# # #

The New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), the largest municipal hospital and health care system in the country, is a $5.4 billion public benefit corporation that serves 1.3 million New Yorkers and nearly 400,000 who are uninsured. HHC provides medical, mental health and substance abuse services through its 11 acute care hospitals, four skilled nursing facilities, six large diagnostic and treatment centers and more than 80 community based health centers. For more information about HHC, visit *nyc.gov/hhc*.